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LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

842
773 Biological conception is clearly understood. One of the myths tells of Kuma's desire to have a child. She asked Puaná to impregnate her in the thumb, but Puaná, who in these myths appears both as trickster and wise man, told her that such impregnation would result in an overpopulation and advised her to allow herself to be impregnated in the ordinary way. She allowed herself to be persuaded, and Hatchawa was born. It may be worth noting that though Hatchawa was the issue, he is referred to as the grandson of Kuma. Whether this inconsistency is to us merely an unexplainable situation, or whether it has greater significance, I was not able to find out.

844
846
616
262 When delivery is imminent a shelter is built for the prospective mother, apart from all other people. Her husband's moiety brothers build a similar structure for him also apart from the camp. The woman is tended by the women of her family and moiety and the husband by the men belonging to his moiety. Both abstain from eating fish, turtle, and crocodile. Iguana and deer meat and the usual vegetable diet are allowed. During delivery and for 10 days after the husband lies in a hammock and engages in no physical activity. Ordinarily he would sleep on the ground. His moiety brothers bring him food. After 10 days he visits his wife but continues to live alone and apart for a month. Now he hunts in the company of other men and is expected to supply his wife with food. The food taboos continue in effect for the full month for both husband and wife. Strict continence is practiced by the husband. When the month is over the family is reunited.

MENSTRUATION

152
841 The Yaruro's actual attitude toward menstruation is not one of fear or wonder. The phenomenon is accepted much as it is among us, as a disturbing but unavoidable event. In the literature on primitive peoples it is often reported that menstruation is held to be a dangerous period for the woman and for the people. One may question the correctness of this observation, if observation it be, with the suspicion that because certain taboos are observed fear is the motivating response. I have found the observance of taboos among a dozen South American tribes with whom I have had personal contact but there has been no indication of actual fear. One wonders if such events have not been too highly dramatized and rationalized by the civilized visitor rather than by the primitives.

841 Among the Yaruros the first period in a girl calls for special treatment at the hands of the women. The girl's face is covered with a

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piece of cloth. (Among the peoples of the Xingu in Brazil she is made to wear her hair over her face, and she is kept from the sight of men.) Whether during this period special initiatory rites are performed I was not able to find out. This part of Yaruro culture is considered to be in the women's domain, and, being a man, I was kept from delving into it.

MARRIAGE

The Yaruros are poor in social ceremonies. Anciently they may have practiced a great many of them but today social life is comparatively simple.

When a boy is ready to marry he may approach his father, or as a matter of fact, the father may approach the son. In any case he is sent to the shaman, who informs him that now he should be ready to assume the duties of a man, and proceeds to instruct him in the nature of those duties. He is told that he must love and cherish his wife; supply her plentifully with food, clothing, ornaments, and children; that he must never use harsh words toward her and that he must take care of her when she is sick; that he must never quarrel with her family, with whom he is expected to live; and of particular importance, that he must remember to take care of his father-in-law and mother-in-law. All of this is ordained by Kuma.

The shaman will then approach the boy's uncle who has a marriageable daughter. No special ceremony seems to take place. The boy simply goes to live with the wife's family and assumes his duties of taking care of her as well as of his parents-in-law.

SICKNESS AND DEATH

Not much material was available on sickness. It must be remembered that the Yaruros have been in contact with European ideas for several centuries and that they understand the use of medicine for the cure of a specific illness.

Nevertheless, Kiberoh, the evil night spirit, is in some fashion associated with illness. If Kiberoh enters the body of a person, the latter will become ill. In such cases the only cure is the intercession of Kuma, who can be called upon to help by the shaman or musico, a term adapted from the Spanish to describe the singing shaman.

The sick person is laid on the ground with his head pointing to the east. At sundown the shaman will stand to the north of the sick person and will proceed to sing, accompanying himself with the rattle. The rest of the people, with the exception of any woman in her menstrual period, line up behind the shaman and sing and dance as they generally do during any of the shamanistic performances. If they indulge in any dancing, however, they do not go around a

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pole in a circle but merely move forward and backward. During the performance it is prohibited for anyone to pass by the head of the sick person. The shaman will sing all night and if by morning the sick person has not shown any marked improvement the woman shaman will lie in a hammock with her head pointing to the east and will continue the singing. Other women will sit in the hammock with her and sing all day long. I myself underwent such attention. If the wife shows little interest in the welfare of her husband it is concrete proof that she does not love him and it is believed he will die. In this there are two factors to be considered from my observation of these people. The first is that a lack of wifely interest is the equivalent of bad medicine and that the husband himself will feel so disconsolate that all desire to live will be lost.

If the sick person dies during the night nothing is done except to stop the singing and dancing. At daybreak his people will drink vast quantities of chica and prepare for the funeral rites. If the sick person happens to be a woman in her menstrual period it is important to note that she is in the care of the woman shaman. The man shaman does not dare to sing to her.

In the morning the dead person is washed by the women and the body is wrapped in a hammock and taken to the burial place. The brothers and the uncles carry the body. The father and mother do not accompany the body to the grave, but in the case of a married man the widow does. The body is interred in the hammock with the head pointing to the east. The bow and arrows, whatever clothing he may have possessed, and any equipment are buried with him, but neither food nor water is necessary. The night after the burial there is a feast in the camp, but the taboo on fish is observed by everyone. The shaman and the people will sing the equivalent of:

The dead one died here, now he has arrived in the Land of Kuma, and there he has been made young again (if a child dies, it becomes a young man or woman, according to the sex). He will know nothing but joy now and will have everything he may desire.

The widow goes on a strict diet for four days. All fires which were burning at the time of the death of the individual are put out and fresh ones are built. On the fourth day the two men, who have put the dead body into the pit, and the widow, bathe; they fast on the fifth. On the fifth night the shaman sings in order to find out if the dead person has reached Kuma, if he has been given a new name, if he has been made young, strong, and rich. For a month after this the widow keeps a strict diet and she is not married for a long time. It is believed that if a man marries a widow soon after her husband has died he will die soon of the same sickness.